

Testimony of Margie Gillis, Ed.D.  
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Education Committee  
Connecticut General Assembly

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Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Committee,

My name is Margie Gillis and I am here to provide testimony in support of Raised Bill 5350, *An Act Concerning Achieving Universal Literacy by Grade Three*. As the President of *Literacy How*, I and a team of twelve reading experts, mentor teachers in their classrooms so that they learn how to apply research-based reading methods to ensure that children learn to read well. Over the past twelve years, we've been engaged with eight hundred teachers in over one hundred schools around the state. A frequent comment from these teachers is that they didn't learn what we're modeling for them in their teacher preparation programs. And, in fact, some have openly wept thinking about the children that failed to learn to read in their classrooms as a result of what their professors failed to teach them. I assure you that *no* teacher wants to carry that burden. We know the cost to the child.

There are three important components of the bill that I'd like to highlight. The first is the alignment between the Common Core State Standards and the reading assessments the bill recommends for universal screening and progress monitoring. We are obliged to *first* find the readers who are struggling and *then* follow their progress as they respond to instruction or fail to do so. Second, the bill articulates what intensive and targeted instruction must entail for those at-risk students. Districts will be held responsible for reading plans at the school, classroom, and most importantly, child level that lay out exactly what instruction will look like to ensure every student's success. Third, and from my perspective most important, is the bill's language requiring that teachers learn the science of teaching reading. Because let's face it. If the teacher doesn't know how to teach a child to read, an individualized reading plan won't make it happen.

I want to applaud the legislators who raised this bill, particularly for the language in Section 10 related to minority students. Many of these students are identified as needing special education. We have data from other states that show a drastic reduction in special education referrals when students receive the right instruction at the right time delivered by a skilled teacher. When this happens, it means that students with legitimate learning disabilities receive the individualized instruction *they* need and so-called 'curriculum casualties' are eliminated.

If a minority student doesn't learn to read by third grade, there's a very good chance s/he will land in jail. This bill goes a long way toward ensuring that doesn't happen. Please fight for all of CT's children – and all of the teachers who want the knowledge and skills to help their students succeed – and support this legislation.

Respectfully submitted,

Margie B. Gillis